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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GUANGZHOU 000034

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PHSA](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: (C) South China Sea - Hainan-Based Think Tank Probes DATT
for Official Policy Positions

11. (U) Classified by Economic/Political Section Chief Steve Lang for
reason 1.4 (d).

12. (C) SUMMARY: During a visit to the National Institute for South
China Sea Studies (NISCS), Defense Attach (DATT) Rear Admiral Gehrke
was treated to more than a generic overview of the institute's
history and current activities. Researchers at the Hainan-based
think tank -- purportedly the only strategic oceanographic institute
backed by the State Council -- peppered the DATT with questions
concerning official USG policy positions on controversial issues
related to China's claims to sovereignty in the South China Seas.
The researchers asked about comments made by U.S. Senator Jim Webb on
the need to balance China's influence in Southeast Asia, USG
motivations for improving ties with countries like Cambodia and U.S.
non-ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Seas
(UNCLOS). In turn, the DATT inquired about China's position on
overlapping claims over exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in the South
China Sea and the status of the maritime dispute with Japan over the
median line separating each country's EEZ in the East China Sea. END
SUMMARY.

Seeking a "Sea of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation"

13. (SBU) The two primary functions of NSCIS are to provide
intellectual and legal support to the peaceful settlement of disputes
in the South China Seas and to promote the economic and social
development of Hainan province, according to NISCS President Wu
Shicun. The institute's promotional video identifies its mission as
the "promotion of a [South China] Sea of peace, friendship and
cooperation." Kang explained to the DATT that the institute
conducted research on the application of international law in the
South China Sea, measures for the peaceful resolution of the Spratly
Island disputes and the cooperative development of natural resources.
NSCIS also hosts international seminars, publishes an annual report
and a monthly South China Seas Journal, and engages in academic
exchanges with other oceanographic institutions. In addition, Kang
said the institute had provided policy consulting services to the
central government on the development of marine resources and
maritime economic development and is working to promote the creation
of a South China Seas economic cooperation organization.

Top Challenge: Prove China's Sovereignty

14. (C) Proving from a "historic and legal point of view" Chinese
sovereignty in the South China Seas over the U-shaped line and the
islands delineated by this line was the top challenge facing NISCS,
according to Kang. She also identified figuring out how to work
together with neighboring countries to jointly develop maritime
resources and settle disputes as another major challenge. She noted
that this would involve the creation of a political and economic
cooperation mechanism that would ensure "peace, stability, mutual
development, and the final resolution of disputes." Kang also told
the DATT that since 30% of Hainan's economy is based on marine or

"blue" resources, the future development of the province depended on a peaceful South China Sea.

Probing DATT for Official Positions

15. (C) As soon as Kang concluded her presentation, a junior researcher asked the DATT whether or not he believed remarks made by U.S. Senator Jim Webb, which called on the United States to do more to balance Chinese influence in Southeast Asia, reflected the official USG position. The researcher also wanted to know if the DATT was familiar with a group known as the Southeast Asian Anti-China Spratly Group and if he could confirm rumors that the United States, Japan, and Australia were members of the group. As a follow-up question, the same researcher asked the DATT to explain why the United States was making efforts to improve relations with countries in Southeast Asia like Cambodia. Moments later, the Director of the NISCS Research Center for Oceans Law and Policy, Zhao Wei, mentioned the incident involving the USNS Impeccable as one of multiple instances in which U.S. Navy ships had allegedly crossed into China's EEZ before asking the DATT to clarify the U.S. position regarding ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Seas. (Comment: The line of questioning researchers launched immediately after the introductory remarks sheds light on PRC sensitivity to potential U.S. involvement in the resolution of territorial disputes in the South China Sea. End comment.)

NISCS: China's Position Supported by International Law

16. (C) Given the researchers' apparent willingness to engage in open discussion, the DATT inquired about China's interpretation of the

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limits of their EEZ in the South China Sea and competing claims made by other countries. NISCS Deputy Director Li Jianwei responded that although China claimed historical sovereignty over the area delineated by the U-shaped, or nine-dotted line, it did not consider the EEZ to be part of its national territorial integrity. Without elaborating Li added that the historical and legal bases supporting the Chinese claim include a 1947 map containing the nine-dotted line, a 1958 declaration that defines China's territorial seas, and the codification of China's claims into domestic law in 1992. (Note: Li referred to additional historical support of the claim from 1998 but did not clarify the reference. End Note.) When asked about the dispute between China and Japan over their respective EEZs and the median line in the East China Sea, Zhao replied that this dispute was "strictly bound by current international laws" and that China's claim of 200 nautical miles from its continental shelf, although it extended into the EEZ claimed by Japan, had a clear basis in international law.

17. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Beijing.

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